# Bernhard Weiß

**Bernhard Weiß** (or Weiss) (30 July 1880 – 29 July 1951) was a German Jewish lawyer and Vice-President of the Berlin police during the Weimar Republic. A member of the liberal Deutsche Demokratisch Partei - founded by another Jew, Eugen Schiffer - Weiß was known as a key player in the political tensions during the Weimar Republic and an opponent of both Communist and National Socialist activity in the city.

Dr. jur. Bernhard Weiß

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## Life

### Family

Born in Berlin into a liberal Jewish family, Weiß was active in the Jewish community of Berlin, Kingdom of Prussia, and was a board member of the (reform) rabbinical seminary and a member of the Central Union of German Citizens of Jewish Belief, the organization dedicated to protecting the civil and social rights of Jews in Germany while at the same time cultivating their German identity.

### World War I

In 1904, Weiß volunteered to undergo military training and was commissioned as a reserve officer in the Royal Bavarian Army, as Jews were not accepted in the Prussian Army. During the First World War, he was platoon leader in a Reserve Sanitation Company and was finally promoted to the rank of Captain (Rittmeister) within the Imperial German Army as the officer commanding a medical company.

### Career

Weiß held a Doctorate in Law and made a name for himself as an efficient lawyer and judge becoming the first Jew to enter the Civil Service in pre-Weimar Germany.

In 1918, Weiß was appointed Deputy Chief of the Berlin Criminal Police, the Kripo (and became its head in 1925). Two years later, in 1920, he was made *Oberregierungsrat* and Head of the Political Police and was appointed Vice-President of the entire Berlin police force in 1927, in which year Weiß ordered the shutting down of the Berlin branch of the National Socialist Party, and in the same year had 500 of their members arrested for belonging to an illegal organization when they returned from a rally in Nuremberg. On several occasions Weiß also prevented Dr. Goebbels from speaking at National Socialist meetings. In 1928 Weiß's Jewish friend Robert Kempner was advanced to Chief Legal Advisor to the Prussian police.

On 9 August 1931, a low point was reached when Erich Mielke and other communists murdered two and wounded another German policeman at the Bülowplatz in Berlin (*Polizistenmorde auf dem Bülowplatz* (https://de.metapedia.org/wiki/Polizistenmorde_auf_dem_B%C3%BClowplatz)). Between 1 January 1928 and the end of October 1932, the KPD terrorist organization murdered eight police officers and injured 870 police officers, mostly seriously. Weiß hated the communists, but his Jewish origin and his anti-NSDAP stance made him open to criticism.

Franz von Papen, Chancellor of Germany of Germany on 20 July 1932, had both Weiß, Polizeipräsident Albert Grzesinski (real surname Lehmann)[1], and the commander of the *Schutzpolizei*, Magnus Heimannsberg[2], under arrest in the officer's prison in Moabit, but were all three were freed on the next day, after they had signed a commitment not to take any more official action.

Weiß fled Germany first in 1933 to Prague with his wife Emma, née Strelitz, and then in early 1934 to London (with Czechoslovak passports), where he set up a small graphic company.

# Death

> *After the end of the war, Bernhard Weiß returned to Germany. In September 1949 he finally visited Berlin - shortly afterwards he wrote to the mayor there, Ernst Reuter: "It is my dearest wish in life to return to Berlin." However, due to cancer that has been progressing for three years, Weiß can no longer accept the offer.*[3]

In 1951, shortly after becoming a German citizen again, he died in London.

# Promotions

- 1905 Underofficer in the Reserve.
- 1906 Vice-Watch Master in the Reserve and candidate for a reserve officer.
- 1908 Lieutenant in the Reserve.
- Senior Lieutenant in the Reserve Reserve (WWI)
- Captain in the Reserve (WWI)

# Awards and decorations

- Iron Cross (1914), 2nd and first Class*reference required*
- Five other decorations for bravery*reference required*

### *Honours*

Today, off Berlin's Alexanderplatz, a small part (street section in front of the Senate Department for Education, Science and Research) of the former Neue Königstraße (since 10 April 1810, before that *Bernauer Straße*; built in the Middle Ages) was renamed Bernhard-Weiß-Straße in 2011. The GDR communists had renamed the Neue Königstraße to Hans-Beimler-Straße (KPD) in 1966. The main part of the former Neue Königstraße/Hans-Beimler-Straße was declared to Otto-Braun-Straße (SDP Minister-President of the Free State of Prussia, from 1920 to 1932) in 2007.

The Union of Jewish Soldiers in the German Armed Forces or *Bundeswehr* (RjF) has been awarding the "Bernhard Weiß Medal for understanding and tolerance" since 2007.[4]

# Sources


- Michael Berger: "Bernhard Weiß, preußischer Jude und Offizier", in: *Eisernes Kreuz und Davidstern. Die Geschichte Jüdischer Soldaten in Deutschen Armeen*, trafo verlag, Berlin 2006, ISBN|3-89626-476-1, p. 203–207.
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- Bjoern Weigel: "Bernhard Weiß" in: Wolfgang Benz (Hrsg.): *Handbuch des Antisemitismus - Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band 2: "Personen", de Gruyter/Saur, Berlin 2009, ISBN|978-3-598-24072-0, p. 880–882.


# References

1. An illegimate child of a maid who rose 'through the ranks' to become a Social Democratic Party of Germany politican, and Minister of the Interior of Prussia from 1926 to 1930.
2. After the Second World War, he was appointed head of police in Greater Hesse by the Americans. He was President of Police in the Hessian capital Wiesbaden from 1948 until his retirement.
3. Bernhard Weiß: Polizeivizepräsident und Propagandaopfer in der Weimarer Republik (https://vrds.de/bernhard-weiss-polizeivizepraesident-und-propagandaopfer-in-der-weimarer-republik/), 2021
4. Vom Rittmeister zum Polizeipräsident (http://www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf/DE_DE_JU_weiss.pdf), 2008

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